# A SERMON

Preached before the

# KING

AT

# VVHITE-HALL,

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By *ROGER HAYWARD*, D.D.
Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty.

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The Prophet *Malachi*, in the 3*d* chapter of his Propheſie and the 14*th* verſe, complains thus of the Jews:

> *Ye have ſaid it is vain to ſerve God, and what profit is there that we have kept his ordinance?*

Wiſdom and Goodneſs do not delight to exact thoſe ſervices, which are neither for the advantage of the Impoſer nor Obſerver, and when power enforces ſuch, it renders them and it ſelf irkſom and tedious: Since *the righteouſneſs of men cannot profit their Maker*, we cannot reaſonably think He ſhould

enjoyn them any thing, which it is not their advantage to obſerve: Were His Commandments fruitleſs, they would unavoidably prevent that cheerful obedience they do require, by ſtifling thoſe hopes that ſhould inſpire it; ſome few *ſuperſtitious Flatterers* they might gain upon, *Lovers* and *Friends* they would have none; *to labour for the wind which ſatisfieth not*, would chill the warmeſt affections, and force the humbleſt heart to complain as thoſe in my *Text* do.

Of whom I have only this to note, when lately they ſate by the waters of *Babylon* they wept when they remembred *Sion*, and their language then no doubt was, *O how amiable are thy dwellings, thou Lord of hoſts! one day in thy Courts is better than a thouſand!* And now through the mercies of God they are there: But ſcarce was the Altar warm with the Sacrifice, but the *vows* and the *tears* they had offer'd for the Houſe of God when ſhe lay in the duſt, are turned into *ſcorn* and *contempt* now ſhe is in her glory; and they talk at ſuch a rate, as if they had never been, either in *Babylon* or in the *Temple*; *Your words have been ſtout againſt me*, verſe the 13*th*; ſtout indeed, for

*Ye have ſaid it is vain to ſerve God, and what profit is there that we have kept his ordinance?*

A Bold charge! that the Service of God was a ſtale uſeleſs device, an unprofitable impoſition on their labour and time, their Folds and their Granaries were emptied, their buſineſs and pleaſures interrupted, their ſpirits and wits pall'd, and they nothing advantag'd by it; and therefore in the next *verſe* they go on in the ſame ſtrain, *the proud are happy, thoſe that work wickedneſs proſper, and thoſe that tempt God* (by ſuch bold defiance, and never trouble themſelves with crowching before Him) *are delivered*: How happy was *Harpalus*, who never was at the charge of a grain of Incenſe on the Gods? I would this language were as obſolete as 'tis truly barbarous! and that there were none that gloried in it as a brave and lofty Idiom! But though there were none that publickly avowed, or ſecretly thought the Service of the *Lord of Lords* is uſeleſs; yet ſince our evil luſts are continually endeavouring (with ſo much ſucceſs) to make it ſo, I hope it will not be loſt time (on both ac-

accompts) to justifie the wisdom of our being here; and shew, that we are no where employed on a better accompt, than in the *Courts of the Lord's House*, and that he never requir'd it of us *to seek his face in vain*.

And in order to it, I hope I may take the *Being of a God*, and the *right of His Service*, for granted, and if any in the mad hurry of their lusts deny the one, or the other, I would only desire to know of them, how they came by their own Beings; and what title they can shew to any service they expect, which is not meerly of others courtesie, and may not soon be cut off, if there be none due to God.

I have then no more to do, but to declare,

1. What the *Service* here meant is.
2. What the certain profits of it are.
3. What are the causes of that *vanity* men are so ready to charge it with.

The sense of the Divine Perfections naturally seizes us with *admiration*, and *this* (if our guilt interpose not, to turn the *light of his countenance* into a *consuming fire*) soon grows into the highest *veneration* and *love*, which is the principal, the eternal *service* of God, which (if it be not toil'd and weakened by our worldly lusts) cannot lye cloyster'd in our breasts, but must, by its mighty force, break out into that *lowly homage* and *ready obedience*, which are the necessary products of it, and

and the other *ſervices* that we owe Him: The firſt of theſe (*his Worſhip*) is the ſubject of the Text, as the whole ſcope of the *Prophet* ſhews, which is to regulate thoſe abuſes, to correct that Heatheniſm, which ſtole with them out of the *Captivity* into the *ſecond Temple*: This being a Duty we owe to Him, firſt as his Creatures, then as ſinful and miſerable, but not paſt hope, conſiſts of thoſe acts which are the cleareſt acknowledgments of our entire *dependance on his goodneſs*, and *ſubjection to his authority*, ſuch are our humble *confeſſions*, *prayers*, *praiſes*, and *meek receiving his laws*, for what other ſolemn recognition of our honour of Him can we make, than the devoting our ſelves to his *Mercy* and his *Government*.

The *Ordinance* of Sacrifice, mention'd in the Text, ſeems indeed to have been the whole of the Jewiſh *Temple Service*, but if we obſerve, from the Prophets, the low accompt God made of it, we muſt conclude, that (what antiquity ſoever it boaſt) it was but the *ſhadow* of this *reaſonable ſervice*: What deſigned proſpect it had (as a Type or viſible Prophecy) on the *Sacrifice of our Saviours Body*, I do not enquire, ſince there is not any notice taken of it by *Moſes* in his Laws, to excite the Peoples Faith or Devotion; but that (beſides that obedience which it chiefly intended) it was an oblation of the Offerer himſelf, by his repreſentative, to God, θυσιῶν ἰυχαριστίαι καὶ λίται, Jer. 7. 23. Pſal. 50. 5.

as

as *Philo* deſcribes it, viſible confeſſions, prayers, and praiſes, is ſo obvious a meaning of it, that none can miſs or doubt of; nor was this way of Worſhip meerly trifling and ſcenical, but (if we conſider the time, the place, the temper of that People) neceſſary to ſave them from falling into the tempting Idolatries of the Nations, 'till ſuch time as the World was prepared for the *Holy Offering*, foretold in the 1. chapter, 11. verſe, the λογικὴ καὶ ἀναίμακτος θυσία, εὐχῆς καὶ εὐχαριστίας, as *Juſtin Martyr* renders it, *mundities ſacrificorum*, as *Tertullian*, the ſacrifices of prayer, praiſes, and a broken and contrite Spirit.

Apol. 2.
Con. Marc. c 22.
Pſ. 50. 14, 15.

This is that *true ſpiritual* Worſhip our *Bleſſed Saviour* hath eſtabliſh'd, having ſcattered thoſe clouds of ſmoke, aſhes, and blood, that darkned the Temple, by the clear diſcoveries of Gods Will, and the doubts and fears which darkned Mens Souls, by the greateſt encouragements of his Spirit to aſſiſt, and Himſelf to intercede for them; and thoſe two poſitive Rites he hath ſuperadded to it, are only the early dedication, and frequent rendition of our ſelves to God, ratified by the uſual Solemnities of Baptiſing and Feaſting, which he conſecrated to the remembrance of the two greateſt Bleſſings, *His Spirit*, and *His Blood*.

By which it appears, how neceſſary the revelation of the Goſpel was to our comfortable and ac-

acceptable Service of God; had he not ſhown us Himſelf by his Son, told us how, and in what Name we are to approach Him, what we are to ask of Him, and what will pleaſe Him, we muſt have wandred in the dark after the Heathens, multiplied our Gods and our Altars, and at length, being tired with a vain ſearch, have rear'd one to the *unknown God*.

Laſtly, as for thoſe Rites and Modes Men are ſo fierce againſt, would they would believe us when we plainly avow, they are no parts of the Chriſtian Worſhip, but ſince the Goſpel (not meant for a *ritual* but *rule of righteouſneſs*) gives not one direct Precept for any the moſt material Circumſtance in it, and confuſion and diſorder muſt, without miracles, expoſe and ruin it, therefore it is neceſſary, that ſome ſhould be appointed and obſerved: And thoſe that are ſcared from the Service of God, by every little Mode in it that is not of Divine inſtitution, muſt leave, not this but all Churches, and finally fall out with their own moſt careful Addreſſes to God; ſo uneaſie to it ſelf, as well as others, is this ſuperſtitious fear of offending God by ſuch little things, as do not deſerve his moſt wiſe and glorious Anger, yea ſo unfriendly to the very Service it ſelf hath it prov'd, that I fear it hath emboldened too many, that are more hardy, to lay it by wholly, as a nice and troubleſome, or

to trifle with it as an indifferent thing, and made it too neceſſary for us to prove, that *'tis not in vain for us to ſerve God*, which is the next thing I am to do.

As our inward Honour is the Principle of our outward ſervice, ſo is this Service the nouriſhment of that Honour; and ſo the whole proof will lye upon this Enquiry, What real benefit redounds to our Souls, and to the World, by the Reverence of God upheld therein? We dare not think ſo meanly of Him, as that He deſigns any advantage to Himſelf by it; if we think the glory He requires of us by it is any new acceſſion to Him; or any thing more than the communication of his Goodneſs to us, under the pretence of adoring Him, we advance our ſelves, as if we with our hands lift up, with our *Hallelujahs*, did ſupport his Throne.

Again, that his Service is uſeful to procure the pardon of our ſins, the care of his Providence, and Eternal Life we are all aſſur'd, but who is ſo fooliſh as to think, that there is any natural virtue in our breath, which grows cold upon our lips, to draw down theſe Heavenly Influences? or ſo immodeſt to preſume, that theſe great favours are the juſt purchaſe of a few good words, a little patient attendance, and lowly behaviour? It remains then, that the great profit of our Worſhip is not in any effects or impreſſions it makes

upon

upon God, *with whom is no ſhadow of change*, but in thoſe diſpoſitions it begets in us, whereby we are fitted for the Divine Bounty; therefore the firſt and immediate benefit of it is to our Souls, and the good influence it hath upon them, is to frame them to the Divine Likeneſs.

'Twas the ſenſe of the beſt Heathens, that the imitation of God is the beſt Worſhip of Him; that it is the proper reſult of it, *if we do not flatter with our lips*, is evident, becauſe the true veneration of any thing, transforms all the thoughts and deſires into its reſemblance, *beholding the glory of* 2 Cor. 3. 18. *God we are changed into the ſame image*; which Image is not a dead Idol of the Brain, the phantaſtick wealth of that wild *Athenian*, who told all the Ships in the Haven for his own, but vital Goodneſs, *Righteouſneſs and true Holineſs*, which are the only participation of the Divine Nature we are capable of. Behold then the Treaſures of the Temple! for ſure all the Graces of Gods Spirit, and all thoſe Divine and Heavenly Diſpoſitions, that enlarge, ſtrengthen, and adorn the Spirit of a Man, that make it equal to all good actions and evil accidents, that fit him to be a God to others, a Heaven to himſelf, and a Friend to his God, do amount to no contemptible ſtore: Thoſe that will allow Virtue to be no more than ſome common Matter, ſtamp'd with Authority, do by that grant it to be currant Coin, but cer-

tainly 'tis hard for any to be in earneſt and ſay, that thoſe Excellencies which have civilized the World, and ſupport Societies, which put Men in the firmeſt poſſeſſion of their own and one anothers Hearts, which all Men admire, and the worſt counterfeit, ſhould not be worth the looking after.

To ſhew how effectual an Inſtrument the Worſhip of God is to the obtaining of them, I ſhall not inſiſt upon the Divine Appointment, which yet, were it but *clay* and *ſpittle*, were enough to juſtifie its ſufficiency, for we live in an Age, wherein not all other only, but even the Divine Authority is ſuſpected, and to quote the Text is judged by ſome as unconcluding in Divinity, as by others in Philoſophy. Nor will I urge the approbation of thoſe, who have faithfully tryed it, and by its Miniſtery arriv'd to be great Examples of Goodneſs, and the vicious Habits and Lives of thoſe that deſpiſe and neglect it: However this may be evaded, yet the force of theſe plain Conſiderations may, I hope, *by Gods grace*, make it undeniable.

1. That the *Reverence of God* is the only firm Foundation to build a true and ſtable Goodneſs on: The Laws of Nature, by that mixture of Natures that is in us, are ſo eaſie to be miſinterpreted, confounded, and ſhaken, that the ſtructure muſt needs be tottering that is built upon them;

them; and how faint and flexible muſt all outward engagements to it be, when a more cogent inconvenience preſſes it, ſo that theſe leave it a meer chance thing, juſt as circumſtances fall out, whether there be any obligation to it or no: But the *Reverence* of the *Great God* preſerves it ever firm and inviolable, over-awes all powers that may aſſault it, and makes the ſtrongeſt temptations againſt it to be its greateſt glory; *Walk before me* (ſays God to *Abraham*) *and be perfect.* Gen. 17. 1. But how can this Reverence be preſerved in our hearts, without frequent and ſolemn attendance and adoration of Him, any more than the Authority of a King, without his Courts of Juſtice and Judgment? The ſtrongeſt habits, yea thoſe natural affections, that are moſt deeply engrav'd on our hearts, wear away gradually by diſuſe and ſtrangeneſs: The Principles of Reaſon, Conſent of Nations, Order and Beauty of the Univerſe, may keep alive the Belief of his Being; but theſe (without the frequent and ſolemn *proclamation of his Will*, and *invocation of his Name*) are but as the dead Records of a Chronicle or Calendar, which will no better keep up the Honour of the Creator, than they do the Wonders of the Creation. Soon would the incurſions of worldly vanities, ſeconded with our own ſenſual luſts, bear down that ἔμφυτον πρὸς θεὸν κοινωνίαν, that natural inclination Clem. Alex. we have to God, and all the Characters he hath left

left of Himself in our Conscience, or in the Creation, if they were not often quickened and refreshed by the most devout remembrances; and that deep *forgetfulness of God* (which we call Atheism) is not born with, nor suddenly seizes upon any, but creeps upon them insensibly, by the disuse of his Service.

2. But supposing we could preserve the Reverence of God without it, yet neither can this, or any other Principle make us good, without his assistance to make it present and powerful. This is a Truth, which the *Conscience* of the worst Men seals, for why else do they flye to Nature, Necessity, and Impossibility, to be their Compurgators? And the *Confessions* of the best do avow, who finding the greatest difficulty to be rooted in themselves, cry out with the Apostle, Rom. 7. 24. *Oh wretched men that we are who shall deliver us!* Yea, and those that never heard of the *mighty Wind on Pentecost*, yet would not grant, that any could be excellent, *sine afflatu divino*, so the Orator; χωρὶς θεᾶ σωτηρείας, so *Hierocles*. And however Men may pride themselves in their αὐτεξσία, and think their Souls can mend themselves when they list, yet they dare not trust their Bodies, when sick and languishing, to the weak remains of life and strength, to effect their own recovery; *Arise, take up thy bed and walk*, would be a scornful taunt from any Mouth but our Makers; some new Spi-

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rits and Succours they are forced to flye to, to joyn with and reinforce their poor baffled powers, for what can they do, when they themſelves are oppreſt and out of order? There is indeed an αὐτοκίνητον, a ſelf-moving power in the Soul, which can never be loſt, there is an Elatery, a *motus reſtitutionis*, an endeavour to Goodneſs in the Conſcience, which cannot be extinguiſhed; but when this power is corrupted, when this ſpring is ruſted, and a mighty weight lyes upon it, what weak effects are we to expect from it? When the *light within us is darkneſs*, when reaſon it ſelf (the τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν) hath tamely given up its Sovereignty, to be *led captive by divers luſts*, how can it alone bring about its reſtauration?

And now, if the one neceſſity of the Divine Aſſiſtance be admitted, I know not how the other of humble applications to Him can modeſtly be denied. God's Grace deſcends not like the common Bleſſings of the Light and Showers, whether Men deſire it or no, it were not grace but force, not aſſiſtance but violence, were it not earneſtly and humbly ſought; *Ask and ye ſhall have, ſeek and ye ſhall find.* And of the ſucceſs of this there can be no doubt, if we conſider in the next place, Mat. 7. 7.

3. The direct propriety our Worſhip of God hath to make us good: There are but two ways, without miracle, whereby we may ever hope it,

by being clearly instructed, and sufficiently obliged and encouraged to it, whatsoever doth these doth edifie, all else is but empty noise and rituality. Now what clearer accompts of Goodness can we desire, than those we have from the Laws and Life of Goodness it self, which took a Body and dwelt among us? and what stronger bonds could Wisdom and Love have knit, than those of Duty and Interest, of Gratitude and Hope, of Assistance and Success? where our Maker intreats, our Saviour bleeds, his Spirit and our Consciences contend with us, where his terrours do beset us, his bowels of compassion yern towards us, and the Heavens are open'd before us, how is it possible we break through all to our ruin? These are the engagements God lays on us in his Worship, but we are not meerly passive there, we come not to be enchanted and chained, but to bind all these upon our selves by our own act and deed; when we *confess*, we do not tell a sad story, but abjure our iniquities before God, his Holy Angels, and Men; when we *pray*, we do not plead or argue with God, but we humbly declare our purposes, and our requests, if they are serious, become our vows; when we *praise* him, we cause not our voices to be heard on high, but we humbly breath out our hearts to him, having no greater present for his Love. Lastly, when we receive the *Holy Communion*, we devote our

selves

ſelves to Him with all the ſolemnities of fealty and friendſhip, and how ſtupendious ſoever a myſtery ſome have made of that Act of Worſhip, (by ſtraining the holy Expreſſions of the Fathers into an ἀποθέωσις of it) yet in this our plain deſpis'd notion, 'tis an excellent Inſtrument of uniting us to the *Holy Jeſus in ſpirit*, and if we believe Him, *the fleſh profiteth nothing*. John 6. 63.

Briefly, the ſumm of all that Goodneſs, that can make us acceptable to *God*, to *others*, to *our ſelves*, is *Humility*, *Charity*, and *purity of Spirit*. For the firſt, Men never ſee themſelves in a true light (thoſe eſpecially who have few or none ſuperiour to them upon Earth) but when they *ſtand in His Preſence*, there the ſhadows flye away, and they (as *Job*) *ſee and abhor themſelves in duſt and aſhes*, there *men of all degrees are found to be lighter than vanity*. Job 42. 5, 6. How great improvement Charity gains by it, will be the next enquiry: But how is it poſſible, that we, who live in continual familiarity with the World (chiefly thoſe who are under no reſtraints of want or fear) ſhould keep our ſelves *undefiled*, without thoſe ſolemn retirements from it, whereby we may diſentangle our Minds from the Cares and Pleaſures of it, and by *taſting the good things of the world to come*, correct the keenneſs of our appetites to this?

'Tis to be expected, that ſome ſhould reply to this Diſcourſe, Hath the *Temple* then monopoliz'd

poliz'd all Goodneſs? Is Grace appropriated only to the *Prieſts Lips*? Can Reaſon do nothing without thoſe dull Formalities? Were not *Greece* and *Rome* as fruitful of happy Spirits, as *the City that was watered with the River of God*?

2 Cor. 4. 7. God forbid, that *we poor earthen Veſſels* ſhould ever arrogate any power over the *Treaſures* committed to us! And would to God all the Courts of Princes, the Seats of Juſtice, and Schools of Learning, were holy as the *Courts of the Lords Houſe*! But if many of the εὐφυεῖς, of the beſt natural diſpoſitions, of the ſtrongeſt faculties, and of the greateſt advantages of education and obſervation, do yet fall ſhort of thoſe Virtues that may thence be expected, there is no reaſon to be given for it, but their neglects of the Miniſtery of Religion; and by this God lets the World ſee, that He is not to be left out in a buſineſs that ſo wholly depends upon Him, that whoſoever

1 Cor. 3. 6. *plants or waters, He alone muſt give the increaſe.* 'Tis no doubt, but the Capitol in *Rome*, and the Schools at *Athens*, had ſome Souls in them, not commonly to be match'd in our beſt Oratories, but we find none ſuch, who had not a ſtrong ſenſe of, and awful regard to the Deity, though their Notions and Worſhip run muddy and foul, falling into the Countrey ſtream; and if they were better with leſs help than we, the more only is our blame: Let us not charge the *Vineyard*

of

*of Gods own planting* for a barren Soil, ſince the *Wilderneſs* hath been ſo fruitful.

2. But this is not all the benefit we gain by our *Service of God*; when the World is well awakened out of its enthuſiaſtick ſlumber and giddineſs, Men will ſee that *Religion* was not ſhorn for a Recluſe to the *Church*, but whatever is good for the Souls, is likewiſe ſo for the Societies of Men: Now the Worſhip of God being ſo fit (as I have ſhown) to beget in us thoſe diſpoſitions, which are (not the Ornaments of a Cloyſter, but the Pillars of the Earth, and) as neceſſary to the very Being of a Society, as the Air they breath in, or the Ground they tread on, doth on that ſcore tutn to a vaſt accompt: Upon which the wiſeſt Heathens have declared it to be συνέκτικον κοινωνίας, καὶ νομοθεσίας ἔρεισμα: But of this I ſhall give but two Inſtances, but they are ſuch, wherein the peace and proſperity of Men is wholly bound. Plut.

1. *A cheerful ſubmiſsion and regard to their ſeveral Superiours.*
2. *A mutual confidence in one another.*

How mean and humble ſoever *Piety* looks, though it dazles not the Eyes as ſplendour, nor terrifies the Fancy as power doth, yet it arreſts the Heart with a more irreſiſtible force than either; for it ſlakes that envy, tames that ſtubbornneſs, and lays thoſe jealouſies, which thoſe

are apt to raiſe and haunt uneaſie minds: For who will grudge to ſubmit to, fear any evil from, or dare any evil to him, that is a lover and beloved of his God? So the Authority of *Parents*, *Prieſts*, *Maſters*, and *Magiſtrates*, is at once ſweetened and reinforc'd. Thus the Heathens deſcents of their Rulers from their Gods, their frequent inſpirations by, and familiar converſes with them, were not the contrivance of their Fancy, but their Wiſdom: 'Twas the *Sacrifice* that ſerved both the Capitol and the Camp, whetted their Wits and their Swords, made them ſtrong Laws, won them rich Provinces; and two of the wideſt Empires now in the World ſtand upon the Credit of a *Prophet* and a *Prieſt*. Thus *Moſes* his continual Addreſſes to God, awed that ſtubborn People, as much as his powerful Rod, that *turned the hard Rock into a Spring of Waters*. But we need not go ſo far, we our ſelves have ſufficiently felt the deep impreſſions of a *pretended devotion*, when a days faſting (or *ſeeking God*) hath more enraged Men to the ſpoil, than the greateſt largeſs could. And though the moſt barbarous uſage of *the moſt Pious King*, may ſeem to weaken the ſecurity of *Religion*, yet we muſt remember, that there were a People, from whoſe fury the real Divinity of our Saviour, without his Legions of Angels, could not defend Him. But I hope there are none among us ſo far relaps'd,

relaps'd, whom after ſo much mercy, an equal Piety would not recover and overcome.

2. The *Worſhip of God* begets a good confidence among Men: Did it no more than make them known and familiar to each other, and remove that ſtrangeneſs which begets ſuſpicion, it were not quite contemptible; but this is the leaſt of its virtue. Freedom of converſe is the beſt means to aſſure Men of each other, they that communicate their thoughts and purpoſes, exchange minds, and give the greateſt mutual hoſtages they can. Now if our Tongues keep pace with our Service, and our Hearts with them, there is none more intimate, though not ſo particular, converſation as here, where, if we mark what we ſay, we jointly diſcover our weightieſt thoughts, our higheſt deſigns, our neareſt inclinations, yea, ſo ingenuous and free we are, as not to diſſemble our very neceſſities and infirmities: All this we do, or we do nothing, when we *confeſs* and *pray* together; and to hatch us yet cloſer, our Prayers are Vows of Charity, when we lift up our hands to Heaven, we ſtrike them with each other, for we beg Gods compaſſion and mercies, on condition of our own; and what is all we come to hear, but ſuch Arguments, ſuch Examples of Love and good will, as will link us together, either in *love* or *condemnation*: But if we go higher, to the *Feaſt of Charity*,

*rity*, there are all thoſe endearments of *bleeding love*, and *flowing plenty*, which may tame and win the fierceſt Natures; in all which (*behold and wonder!*) the *God of Love and Peace* Himſelf becomes a *Mediator* betwixt us, uſing all the motives of his Authority and Love, to lay our quarrelſom luſts, and unite us in an everlaſting friendſhip. But if our *Service* reach not the perfection of its deſign, yet this great good it uſually doth, it begets a good opinion of Mens Conſciences, which is the beſt hold they can have of each other; ſo the *Eaſterns* ratified their Covenants with Sacrifice, and the fouleſt Character of *Doeg's* Treachery to *David* was, that *they took ſweet counſel together, and went into the Houſe of God like friends.* Pſal. 55. 14. And now, if our worſhipping God together proves not ſo ſtrong a cement of friendſhip as trading, or fighting, or drinking together, it is becauſe we make our *gain*, our *glory*, and our *belly our God*, in that the mediation of theſe is more powerful with us, than that of our *great God and Saviour*. Laſtly, 'tis to be hoped, that (after ſo ſad experience) none will lay the charge of thoſe Contentions and Wars, that have waſted the Church, at her doors; 'tis not *Gods Service*, but the ſervice of Mens *luſts* and *paſsions* (that for their better credit take that name) which hath done thoſe miſchiefs; but if the *Religious Feuds* have ſtill been (as is obſerved) the moſt fatal, it makes

makes good the truth, for their *Friendſhips* have at the ſame time been moſt firm.

3. Laſtly, if at the foot of this accompt I add, that the *Service of God* fits us for his *eternal viſion*, it will (to us that hope and pray for that happineſs) be judged very profitable; ſo cloſely are the Intereſts of both Worlds connected, that whatever diſpoſes us to live *well* and *happily* here, fits us likewiſe for *life eternal*; for neither will our Natures be otherwiſe changed, than from the bondage of our *corruptible bodies*; nor our Service, than from thoſe *rudiments of this world*, *prayer* and *penitence*, which our preſent ſinful and neceſſitous ſtate of Pilgrimage requires; the Bleſſed Angels ever *hearken to the Voice of his Word*, and *never ceaſe to give glory and honour to God*: Mens future portions will not be aſſign'd them according to their *hopes*, but their *habits*; they therefore that have ſpent all their days in the *Tents of wickedneſs*, whoſe *tongues have been full of curſing and bitterneſs*, whoſe hands have never been lift up but to *violence* or *vanity*, without ſome more ſudden, violent, and miraculous change, than they have any ground to hope for, would be utterly incapable to be happy in that Society, in thoſe Employments, to which they have been ſo wholly eſtranged. But how eaſie, how pleaſant will our paſſage be, from the *Courts of Gods Houſe* to *the Holy of Holies*? How ready, how joyful ſhall we be, to joyn with

Phil. 3. *laſt.*

Pſal. 103. 20.

Rev. 4. 8.

with the Heavenly Quire in their *Hallelujahs*?

Thus useful it is to serve God, to our *Souls*, to our *Societies*, to our *Hopes of Heaven*; and yet it is too sadly true, that too many are neither the fitter to live nor to dye for it, and that's the matter of the last Enquiry, *viz.*

3. How it becomes so vain, it must be from one of these Causes:

1. *That Men misapply it to a wrong end*, or
2. *That they manage it a wrong way*, either of which must needs render the best things useless.

1. There are too many so gross, as to think there is no profit but 20 *per cent.* nor gain but ready money. This was the *Jews* humour, who brought their Sacrifice as to a *Market*, not an *Altar*, and came to barter the Flesh and Blood of their Beasts for fair *Harvests* and full *Vintages*, and when they missed, complained *all was in vain*. That the Service of God hath a friendly regard to worldly prosperity, is evident, because it inclines Men to be serious, engages them to be honest, diligent, and temperate in all things, and inspires them with that calmness of mind, and comfortable trust in Gods Providence, which are surer ways to prosperity, than all the little slights of the *Mammonist*; but if we expect more from it, we defeat it, and deceive our selves.

Others,

Others, that would be more *ſpiritual*, put not their Devotion to that drudgery, which is fitter for the ſweat of their brows; all the gain they expect from it, is to have their Fancies a little refreſh'd, their Wits exerciſed, their Opinions, and perhaps their Luſts ſoothed, and (if it ſo happen) away go they, well ſatisfied, though indeed *poor, and miſerable, and blind, and naked*; but, if this be all their aim, they might have gain'd as much in the Fields or the Theatre. Great is that joy, and full of glory, that all pious Souls have in their Devotions; but 'tis not ſuch as is born of noiſe or art, and dies with it, but that more ſolid and laſting, that ſprings from the ſenſe of Goodneſs, entring like light and health into the Soul.

Laſtly, ſome perhaps are ſo vain, as to hope by their Service to raiſe a mighty Intereſt in Heaven, and by their loud importunities, or more ſtudied addreſſes, to be able to tire or charm the Almighty, to do what they will, without any regard to any impreſſions made on their own Spirits. What a wild conceit is this of our Service, which is enough to ſpoil it, were it winged with the ardours of Angels? Can Men be ſerious, and think that their Confeſſions can inform Him of more than He knows of them? that their Petitions can direct Him what to do? or that their Language and Paſſions can overcome Him againſt

his Will? No, no! we *confeſs* only to the melting down our own Iron necks, we *pray* to excite and engage our own ſtupid and falſe hearts, we *intercede* to enlarge our charity, we *praiſe* and *laud* Him to increaſe his love in us; ſo much as is the influence of our Service upon our ſelves, ſo much only is our gain; if this be not our aim, we only *ſow the Wind, and may reap the Whirlwind.*

2. The other Cauſe of the vanity of our Service, is our uſing it a wrong way. 'Tis too common with us to poſt it off (as a piece of *Knight-ſervice*) to a Proxy, and to think we have nothing to do in it, but to lend an Eye, or an Ear, to make a dumb ſhew, or a formal noiſe. Were the Holy Offices of Religion ſome common vile drudgery, or ſome powerful Charms or Spells, they would not deſerve or need our thoughts; but they are of another nature, wiſe and reaſonable Inſtruments for our good, and therefore require an *intent mind*, and an *honeſt and good heart*, to make them effectual. If Men come beforehand reſolved, that *hearing they will not hear, nor conſider*, though the *Angels*, or the *Holy Jeſus* would again deſcend, they would baffle their Miniſtery. The Ground we ſtand on is not ſo Holy, but if we do not ἀνυποδέτοι θεῖν, *keep our feet when we come into the Houſe of God*, we may return as impure as we came; nor is the Air ſo fine, as to cleanſe us from all pollution, by the mere ventilation of it;

Pyth. Symb. Eccleſ. 5. 1.

*Moſes*

*Moſes* his Tabernacle, nor *Solomon*'s Temple, (though they had the *Shecinah*, the Glory of the Lord filling them) could not hallow a careleſs Worſhipper: Did we negotiate our buſineſs, our Trade, with as little thoughtfulneſs as we pray and hear, our gains would come in but ſlowly; we need not indeed that ſubtilty, and thoſe cautions, in our dealings with God, as with Men, yet certainly He alone is not to be ſerved, nor our Souls only to be improved, without any thoughts or care for them. And indeed, how is it poſſible, that ſuch excellent Prayers, ſo often ſent up to the Throne of Grace, ſhould periſh in the Air? that all the powerful perſwaſives to Goodneſs; that Heaven and Earth afford, which ring continually in our Ears, ſhould never reach our Hearts? that having one Advocate within us to help our Infirmities, and another in Heaven to preſent our Services, yet they ſhould be ſtill ineffectual? It could not be, but that we only are inexorable, and will not hear our own Prayers; we are imperſwaſible, and will not believe our own ſelves, our own Conſciences: We *hear* and *approve*, and yet we *reject* the Counſels of God; we cry to God for *mercy*, and yet will have none upon our ſelves; we ask for *grace*, and yet will not take it when 'tis offered to us, or *turn it into wantonneſs*. Thus, whilſt we anticipate our latter end, and ſtand like Tombs in the Church, full

of uncleanneſs, what good can we expect? When the *ſacrifice* fell, but the beaſt lived in men; when the *incenſe* aſcended, but their *filthineſs remained in their skirts*; when the Air was filled, and every thing moved with their cryes, but their own inſenſate hearts; then had the Prophet
Jer 7. 4, 8. reaſon to complain, *Ye truſt in lying words, ſaying, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, ye truſt in lying words which cannot profit*; and 'tis no wonder to hear themſelves complain, *It is in vain to ſerve God.*

And now upon the whole we may conclude, 1. What a neceſſary connexion there is betwixt the Services of *Worſhip* and *Obedience*: I pray it may never happen to theſe, as it hath done to others as near Allies (Faith and Good Works, Reaſon and Grace) to be put at odds, and both to loſe by a needleſs competition; and yet our practiſe bids too fair for putting a doctrinal difference betwixt theſe; why elſe do we offer God, an *hour or two's* attendance for a whole *weeks* licentiouſneſs, a few *bows* and *Amens* for a many high *provocations*? We run deeply in debt to his Juſtice, in confidence, that the next time we wait on Him in his Houſe, we ſhall clear all, and then, as if we had left Him our Debitor, we forbear not any thing our luſts do call for. Thus we make our Chriſtian Sabboth and Service *a reſt from our ſins*, but in the worſt ſenſe, that is, only a

ſhort

ſhort pauſe, to take breath and heart to purſue them with a greater reſolution. Were our *God* ſome *Topical* one, as thoſe of the *Hills* and *Valleys* of old, whoſe Authority were ſhut up within their Walls, then this might paſs for *Worſhip*, but whatever we call it, 'tis but a baſe and ſcornful Flattery, fit for an *Idol that is nothing*. God forbid we ſhould any of us ſerve our *Friend*, our *Benefactor*, our *King*, as we do *our God*! that is, come and ſtand demurely in his preſence, accuſe our ſelves and vow amendment; hear all he can promiſe or threaten to engage us to it, and immediately take every trifling occaſion to rebel againſt him. If we need not *obey* Him, why are we ſo fooliſh to *worſhip* Him? If we muſt *worſhip* Him, why are we ſo falſe to *diſobey* Him? Is his Being ſo *glorious*, to deſerve that; and are his Laws ſo *contemptible*, to endure this? We need not uſe ſo much *ceremony* to be wicked and miſerable: Let us take heed leſt He juſtly reward us for ſuch daring mockery, that is, *laugh at our calamity, and mock when our fear cometh as deſolation, and our deſtruction as a whirlwind.* Prov. 1. 26, 27.

And as our *worſhip* without *obedience* is vain, ſo our *obedience* without *worſhip* is impoſſible: We complain againſt the corrupt manners of the Age and cry out, *From the ſole of the feet even unto the head, there is no ſoundneſs in it, but wounds and bruiſes and putrifying ſores*; and what do our Iſ. 1. 16.

com-

complaints, but only fret and exaſperate? what can all our Arts do, but only palliate the Evil? How ſhall we be mended, whilſt our Souls are out of frame? and how ſhall we ever recover our *ancient Virtues*, without that *ancient ſerioufneſs in Religion*, which hath ever been obſerved to be the particular *Genius* of this Nation, yea even then, when it fell infinitely ſhort of thoſe great advantages it now enjoys? Can *Virtue* riſe out of the duſt, or *Righteouſneſs* ſpring out of the earth, or *Sobriety* and *Purity* grow out of our corrupt luſts? Can knowledge or reaſoning alone ſubdue thoſe evil habits, they have been ſo long uſed to abet and maintain? *Mercies* have made us wanton, and *Judgments* ſtupid, and we have been *too miſerable*, and are yet *too happy* to be mended, without the *mighty grace of God.* This then is the great, the fundamental Evil, the ſourſe of all the reſt, that we neglect or pervert the greateſt and only *remedy* he hath appointed for our *cure*, that we trifle with God in his Service, that ſhould procure thoſe ſuccours, without which we ſhall never be better; whileſt ſome Men make it their *ſport*, others their *trade*, ſome the matter of their *contention*, and ſome few the *entertainment* of their *idle* time: Whilſt we thus abuſe Gods counſel and aſſiſtance, what hope can remain for us? Were that breath beſtowed in *hearty prayers*, that is ſpent in *fruitleſs*

*mur-*

*murmurings*, did we uſe that thoughtfulneſs in our *addreſſes to God*, that we loſe in our vain *contrivances*, they would no doubt turn to a better accompt than they do: when we have wearied our ſelves with our *loud complaints*, and our *little remedies*, we may find at length, that *'tis as impoſſible to mend, as to make a World, or a Soul, without God.* And however in the days of our *proſperity* we trifle with him as an uſeleſs thing, without whom we can ſhift well enough, yet *when diſtreſs and anguiſh cometh upon us*, we ſhall, with much more earneſtneſs, but as little ſucceſs, *call upon him, but he will not anſwer, ſeek him early, but ſhall not find him*, as the tormented Glutton in Hell (where there is a *faith* though *trembling*, a *devotion* though *deſpairing*) begg'd one drop of refreſhment, but it could not be granted him. What help then are we to expect from theſe, who talk at the rate of thoſe in the *Text*, I mean not the wild *Enthuſiaſts* only, (whoſe zeal is as keen againſt *Courts* as *Churches*, were they not better guarded) but thoſe that would be the *Reſtorers of Reaſon*, the *Defenders of the Liberties of Nature*, who would free the Countrey from the impoſtures of thoſe *wily Craftſmen*, who cry up this their *Diana* to get them utterance for their ſhrines. Whoſoever he be, that makes *Gods Worſhip* an Engin to keep up *his own*, *whoever he be that ſits in the Temple of God, to exalt himſelf*

Prov. 7. 28.

Luk. 16. 19.

2 Theſſ. 2. 4, 8.

*himself above all that is called God*, we pray, as the Apostle propheſieth, *that God would deſtroy them with the ſpirit of his mouth.* But ſure all Scripture is not *Bel* and the *Dragon*, nor all *houſes of prayer* become *dens of thieves*; were there any *cloſe myſteries*, any *ſecret Adyta*, any pretences to *inſpirations* or *miraculous powers*, in our Worſhip, then they might ſuſpect ſome juggling; but when every part and paſſage is plain and open (as the Book that contains it) to the meaneſt Worſhipper, what is it they can be jealous of? And would they would conſider, e're they cry *down with it, even to the ground*, whether *Schools*, and *Colledges*, and *Courts*, do not lean on the ſame Foundation! Were the Names of Virtue and Goodneſs, were Mens own Nature, and the Happineſs of the World, truly dear to them, the Names of the *Great God* the *Maker of the World*, *Father of Spirits*, and *Fountain of Goodneſs*, and of the *Holy Jeſus* the *Reſtorer* and *Saviour* of them, would be highly venerable to them, and all the Offices of Adoration to them would be the moſt wiſe and ſerious actions of their life. How much then do they deſerve the care and love of us all! thoſe eſpecially, who have not only the Government of Men, but the higheſt, the tendereſt Truſt imaginable (greater than that of *Durandus* his Angels) committed to their charge; who though they cannot with their foot *ſtop the ſwelling Tide*, yet

*Bzk.* Chron. *Canutus.*

yet by their *hands* and *tongue* may check the *Land-flood* of *profaneneſs* and *barbariſm*, and by God's bleſſing ſay, *Thou ſhalt go no further*, and ſo help to ſave an Age of Souls, which elſe muſt periſh at their charge; whoſe Examples are able to retort all the Arguments of Irreligion upon its own breaſt, whoſe very countenanee and behaviour is able to demonſtrate, far more effectually than all our faint breath, that *'Tis not in vain to ſerve God.*

To conclude, This weak accompt I have given of the uſefulneſs of *Religious Worſhip*, hath no other deſire than to remove that ugly vizor, that hath disfigured, not only the Faces of the *Votaries*, but even that of *Religion* it ſelf, and made it look like a diſmal and *chagrene* thing; and ſo hath it diſguiſed its native lovelineſs, that ſome *enjoyn* it, moſt look upon it as a meer *penance*, and to be ſad and devout, to be religious and ghaſtly, are grown the ſame; ſo thoſe in the *Text* make the *Service of God* conſiſt in *walking mournfully before him*, which whether it relate to their *gate*, *look*, *habit* or *temper*, or *Ezra's faſting*, 'twas nothing that God required of them; the *Good God* never intended his Service ſhould waſte any Mans ſpirits, damp their hearts, drein their eſtates, or diſturb the World; if any therefore be ſick, be poor, be diſpirited, or contentious, 'tis not this that hath made them ſo. There are indeed in *Religion* ſome ſharp Medicines, and if theſe put Men

to pain and ſorrow, they are to blame their intemperance, that hath made them neceſſary, and to call in the hopes of health, to make them tolerable; and yet there is not any the leaſt bodily neceſſity, the meaneſt worldly advantage, no nor the vileſt luſt, but puts Men to more torment and ſlavery, forces them to bow, to watch, to pray, to kiſs the duſt, more than the moſt painful addreſſes of the humbleſt Suppliant and Penitent, under the firſt and pureſt Diſcipline of the Church.

Did *God* require ſome hard and heavy things of us, were our *Service in the Church* as tireſome as that of the *Gibeonites in the Temple*; or as cruel as that of *Baal's Votaries*, and to as little purpoſe; then might we ſay, as they do, (*ch.* 1. 13.) *What a* wearineſs *is it?* But ſince He asks no more, than that we *reſt from our labours*, and *come together into his preſence*, that *we worſhip, and fall down and kneel before the Lord our Maker*, that *we laud and love his Name*, that *we confeſs and forſake our ſins* which have no other fruit but *ſorrow* and *ſhame*, and that *we hear and obey his Laws* that our Souls may live; let us never repine to give Him this *reaſonable Service*, which will ſo abundantly reward us, *enrich our Souls with goodneſs*, *unite our hearts in love*, and prepare us for the ſer-

Joſh. 9. 23.
1 Kings 18. 28, 29.

vice

*vice and joys of Angels and perfected Spirits*, by the Merits of *Jesus Christ* our Saviour: *To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all Honour, Worship, and Obedience given, world without end.* AMEN.

*FINIS.*

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

By the same Author:

*A Sermon Preached before the King at* White-hall, November 30. 1673.